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SUBJECT Admiral Stansfield Turner Interviewed

REID COLLINS: Well, there are more encouraging signs today the release of some Western hostages in Lebanon might be happening in the near future. Winding up a four-day fact-finding mission to that region, the British Foreign Office minister Douglas Hogg said he has a feeling the hostage chapter may be coming to a conclusion. And a leading Iranian newspaper also predicts that several U.S. hostages may be freed soon on humanitarian grounds.

Here to discuss the hostage situation and the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in terrorism in general is Stansfield Turner, Admiral Turner, the former CIA Director, also the author of "Terrorism and Democracy," a book that considers the failed and successful policies of some eight Presidents in dealing with terrorism.

Admiral Turner, we appreciate very much your being here.

What do you make of the current rumors again extant that some hostages may be getting out?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Oh, I think it looks very favorable. I don't believe they're all going to get out at once or quickly, because these things seem to always protract themselves.

An interesting and key point here, which I make in my book, in particular, Reid, is that we do make deals with terrorists. There's a lot of talk in this country that we should never do that, but seven of the eight Presidents I surveyed did make deals or condone deals with terrorists. You have to judge whether it's an acceptable or an unacceptable deal.

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I think what's in the making here would be barely acceptable. To wit, we will encourage the Israelis to release some prisoners from their jails, in return for which the hostages will come out of Lebanon.

COLLINS: Sheik Obeid, maybe somebody of that character, may be released?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes, but they're talking even larger numbers. He's one very key person, but there are three or four hundred other Palestinians and Lebanese in the jails there. And those seem to give the Israelis a little more problem.

But at the same time, we're in such strained relations with Israel, that I think they may be willing to do this for us to sort of ease the tensions overall.

COLLINS: Isn't there usually also an exchange of plain old hard cash?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Not too often, I don't think. It did happen with Jimmy Carter, and that's where we had frozen \$11 billion of Iranian money and we gave some eight billion of it back to them. That was a cash deal, in a sense, but it was Iranian cash we were giving back that we had frozen after they took our hostages.

COLLINS: And in your administration -- and you were then CIA Director -- there was a question of the legality of that whole thing in the beginning, the freezing of the cash, wasn't there?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, only a portion of it. The assets of Iran that were held by U.S. banks in their overseas branches were not covered by U.S. law. And the other countries said, "We don't think we're allowed to do this." Fortunately, those other countries were very nice about this and they said, "But we'll put it in our court process to determine." And, of course, that dragged out and out and we never came to a resolution of it.

I believe the freezing inside the United States was perfectly legal.

COLLINS: All right. In your book you say you have some things included this time that in a previous book you wrote the CIA's Director at the time wouldn't allow you to print. What are the new things?

ADMIRAL TURNER: These were the CIA's role in supporting the rescue operation in Iran, flying an airplane into the desert and landing by the light of the moon to find out whether we could

make this a temporary airfield, and the CIA's actual conduct of the rescue of six Americans who escaped from the embassy when it was captured and took refuge in the Canadian Embassy. The CIA got more reasonable over the intervening years.

COLLINS: All right. So in the new book we find out the CIA penetrated Teheran rather extensively. You had a lot of people working for you.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I was buying trucks and warehouses and all kinds of things to prepare for the rescue effort.

COLLINS: All right. And the rescue effort, as we know, was dependent largely upon the work of eight helicopters, seaborne kind of anti-submarine, anti-mine helicopters flown by Marines, not by Delta Force people, an admixture of people that you say may have led to the downfall. Tell me why.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think the fundamental problem with that rescue operation is that we, admirals and generals like myself, since the end of World War II haven't paid enough attention to this kind of lower level of warfare. We've been, justifiably, understandably concerned with nuclear war, with defense of Europe, big kinds of engagements. But we also should have been putting a small amount of effort on this kind of activity. It was too small, what we did, in terms of training and preparing. We could have had helicopters that would not have to have refueled in order to get to Teheran. That was doable. That was within the state of the art. We hadn't anticipated that kind of situation.

COLLINS: All right. And you say you start out with eight. You lost three due to mechanical troubles or decisions by their commanders that they wouldn't work. But you suggest you could have gone on with the five remaining.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think there were several ways to have gone on. And all three of the helicopters that did not go were flyable right to the end. Two of them were flyable at some kind of a risk. They might have crashed and we'd have lost some lives. But I think the commander on the scene had the option of either going with five or of taking a sixth one along that was flyable at a risk. And if it crashed and he lost some people, that would have been unfortunate. But if it had got through, then he could have had enough there to do the job. If he had not got through, if it had crashed, he had the option then of taking the rest of them and retreating the next night, coming back out. You see what I mean? So that it wasn't an irrevocable commitment if he had gone on and not had enough because the one helicopter crashed.

4

COLLINS: I want to ask you in a minute, when we come back, why, in your opinion, they did not go on, what the psyche of quitting was in those days. And perhaps a little bit about the story that still floats about, primarily authored by Gary Sick, about what the Administration may or may not have had to do with Desert One.

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COLLINS: You suggest in the book a possible post-Vietnam psychological military reason why helicopter commanders may not be willing to take that extra mile, gung-hoism. What is it?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think that we didn't get them up on the step enough. I don't think, because the mission was so secretive, that there was a lot of gung-ho. Except it was gung-ho in the Delta Force. But the commander of the overall operation forgot about these helicopter pilots being just as critical to his mission as the troops who were going to storm the embassy. And I don't think he motivated them as much.

COLLINS: Beckwith.

ADMIRAL TURNER: And General Vaught, his overall superior.

And overall, I think the other problem is simply that the helicopter pilots were always under pressure to be ready tomorrow, and they never had the time to train and be thorough in their preparation, as we would have hoped.

COLLINS: Had they gone on, had the embassy been attacked, had the rescue force flown in to an air base that was to have been taken, etcetera, would it have worked?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think it could have worked. And obviously all of us who were involved in it did, or we wouldn't have recommended it to the President. There were risks at every stage, but I think the Iranian people defending the embassy were amateurs. They weren't really trained soldiers. I think the surprise we would have brought to the situation would have overwhelmed them in just a matter of minutes, and we would have been able to pull it off.

But you have to acknowledge that at each step -- and there were two more crucial steps to go after the one we failed on -- it could have broken down, also.

COLLINS: You, above all people who have ever sat in this room, should know the truth or the consequences, or whatever, of the Gary Sick suspicion, let's call it, that there was a

5

political motivation on the part of people in support of now-President Bush and then-to-be-President Reagan to see the hostage situation unresolved during the 1980 campaign. Do you believe the thrust of the Sick story?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think Gary has added enough circumstantial evidence here that we've got to take it seriously. And there are three situations which President Bush could dispel right away if he wanted to and made the effort. And I think it's important to him and to the country that he do that. It's the accusation that he went to Paris and negotiated this deal just two weeks before the presidential election. Well, surely the Secret Service have records of where the vice presidential candidate was.

COLLINS: Hasn't he denied that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: He has denied it but he has not produced the hard evidence. And even in a court case, when they sent some Secret Service people, they failed to bring any kinds of documents or proof.

Similarly, the accusation is Mr. Casey was in Paris; and our present Ambassador to Korea, Donald Gregg, who was then a CIA employee. And there are records about where people like that were, also.

COLLINS: You were the Director in the CIA. Didn't you know? Didn't you know where all the ducks were?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I did not know where all the ducks were, in this case. Gregg wasn't really working for me at the CIA. He was working down at the White House at the time, on loan from the CIA. And we just don't spys on Americans that much. We're not allowed to. So it wasn't our job to keep track of where Mr. Bush and Mr. Casey and people were.

But nonetheless, this can easily be cleared up. And I think it's important for the White House that they do clear it up. It's important for the country.

COLLINS: All right. Let's round this discussion around to the hostage, Lebanon situation. Why hasn't there been any employment of the Delta Force in their behalf?

ADMIRAL TURNER: My understanding is that the intelligence people can't tell them precisely where the hostages are. Ronald Reagan made that comment the day before he left office. He said, "We never have known where the hostages are located." It's just too difficult a job for the intelligence people to penetrate those fanatical, small terrorist organizations that are holding them.

COLLINS: Some people say the job was made more difficult by the fact that you canned a lot of people when you were there.

ADMIRAL TURNER: We didn't can one person overseas. We didn't reduce one person from the operating end of the CIA. We reduced overhead in the headquarters, which was hurting the operations overseas, not helping.

COLLINS: All right, sir. That's the time we have for a big subject that, in fact, encircles the globe and involves a great many people.

We've been talking with the former Director of the CIA, Admiral Stansfield Turner. Admiral Turner is the author of the new book, "Terrorism and Democracy." Worth a read.